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AUTHOR Keyton, Joann
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ABSTRACT

One aspect of organizational work groups has been ignored by both group and organizational communication researchers. The concluding period or termination of an organizational work group is disregarded while research focuses on the assignment, development, and maintenance of groups. In the organizational context, how work groups process the conclusion of their task and the personal and professional relationships developed in the group are important to examine and understand. Given that an organization's members are continually assigned and recycled to various work groups, task forces, and production teams, lessons learned in one group can be passed on to the next. In addition, organizational members leaving a group context must operate within the closely defined sphere of the organization, and may have to work again with the other group members or with people who know them. Dissolving groups should have the opportunity to reflect both upon the work they have achieved and the relationships that may have developed within the group. Future research should examine how a work group communicates in the termination phase and how the group termination affects its members and the overall organization. (Thirty-nine references are attached.) (Author/SG)

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BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

Joann Keyton
Assistant Professor
Baylor University
Department of Communication Studies
PO Box 97368
Waco, TX 76798
817-755-1621

One aspect of organizational work groups has been ignored by both group and organizational communication researchers. The concluding period or termination of an organizational work group is disregarded while research focuses on the assignment, development, and maintenance of groups. In the organizational context, how work groups process the conclusion of their task and the personal and professional relationships developed in the group are important to examine and understand. Given that an organization's members are continually assigned and recycled to various work groups, task forces, and production teams, lessons learned in one group can be passed on to the next.

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BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

How organizational work groups terminate has been neglected by both group and organizational communication researchers. In group research, the termination stage typically cannot be studied since the groups under scrutiny are temporary, one-time, laboratory or other experimental or concocted groups without a larger organizational context. In the organizational context, the termination stage is excluded to focus on the development and maintenance of groups.

While both the group and organizational communication literature examine the development and maintenance of groups, how these very same groups come to closure has been excluded from research agendas. This is an important oversight given that businesses continue to rely on organizational work groups. From the management viewpoint, Peters (1987) stresses the team approach, and Kanter (1989) encourages organizations to use teamwork in structuring functions. While we have a fairly good understanding of the front end of the organizational group phenomenon, how groups dissipate and the affect on both individuals and the larger organization is unknown as group members retreat back into the organizational context. When an organizational work group concludes its business, its members don't go away. Rather, they eventually become members in other groups. Group processes remaining utmost in members' minds (positive or negative) may be formed in groups' declining stages. Recency research would indicate that the most recent group behavior is most significant whether it be positive or negative.

Even a good group with a dissatisfying ending may sour group members' perceptions of the group task. Attitudes or values formed during this period are likely to have a dramatic influence on organizational members as they take on new group assignments.

Termination is Another Unique Characteristic

Putnam (1988) outlines "three unique characteristics of organizational groups: connectivity, hierarchical structure, and multiple-group membership" (p. 76). The first and last of these underscore the need to address the group termination phenomenon. Because a single work group is only one of many embedded features of an organizational structure, the life cycles of important groups are likely have some impact on the overall culture of the organization, and, at the very minimum, affect group participants as they participate in simultaneous groups.

The literature does not provide methods, procedures, or facilitative advice for the concluding activities of work groups. While memos announce the start-up of such groups and schedules are rearranged to accommodate group meetings and group work, there is usually no formal device marking the end of the group. Some groups consider output as a signal of the group's end, but this type of end marker does not deal with the process of the group, only its output. The difficulty of ending groups is succinctly articulated by Bradford and Bradford (1988): "It is easier to give birth to a standing committee than to kill it off" (p. 90).

Reasons for work group cessation are also part of the unique factors of organizational work groups. Beyond the typical group-completes-its-projects-and-is-no-longer-necessary event, groups

also terminate as organizations reorganize to meet readjusted goals, and as divisions or departments of organizations are merged with others or are phased out completely. A third factor that contributes to the longevity or brevity, and the simplicity or complexity of work groups is the political agenda from which these groups develop.

The objective of this essay is to introduce the end-of-group phenomenon as an important factor of organizational life. The literature of group communication, organizational communication, and organizational behavior will aid in structuring assessment parameters. A field experience analyzed through fantasy themes, and a case study of a fictional television work group and its real life counterpart will be used to illustrate the phenomenon. A research agenda will be presented.

The Group and Decision Development Literature

The Communication Perspective

Most of the communication research in this area focuses on the development of decision making in the small group context as outlined by Fisher (1970, 1974). Phases of group decision making are described according to the type of communication.The first phase, orientation, is characterized by introductory talk among the members as well as introductory talk about the task. In this phase, group members seek and give orientation to understand each other and the nature of the group's work. Conflict, the second phase, is characterized by verbal exchanges which establish and persuade others to accept a particular position. Phase three is labeled emergence because the group shifts from conflicts over

position to exchanges seeking the best final recommendation for action. The last phase, reinforcement, is characterized by a spirit of group unity and cooperation among group members. These phases represent the natural path of group decision making. Together, they represent decision emergence. What happens to the group in the termination stage and the effects of this period on group members' is not discussed. While the model emphasizes process interaction, interaction analysis is limited to the group's work on task activity. It is not extended to the process interaction that groups can have (and should have) when the task is complete and the group is about to disband.

A more recent approach is Poole's decision development model. Poole and Roth (1989b) test the model which "assumes that groups actively structure their decisions, as opposed to the often implicit assumption that group behavior is a reaction to external, determining causal factors" (p. 550). Earlier development and multiple examination (Poole, 1981, 1983a, 1983b; Poole & Doelger, 1986; and Poole & Roth, 1989a) of the theory and its underlying components indicate that group interaction is engaged on a decision path which can be predicted by contingency variables. Poole and Roth (1989) conclude that groups appear rational in adapting the decision development path to contingencies they face. While bringing new insight into a group's decision activities, the model does not go beyond the decision making stage.

The Organizational Behavior Perspective

According to Gersick (1988), past research can be identified with one of two main streams of research and theory. Research

falling under the heading of group dynamics research is the first. Developed from work on therapy groups, T-groups, and self-study groups, focus was on achievement of personal and interpersonal goals like insight, learning or honest communication (Mills, 1979). Although many researchers worked in this area, Tuckman (1965) synthesized these efforts with the development of the forming, storming, norming, and performing sequence so frequently cited. Later, Tuckman and Jensen (1977) advocate adding an adjourning stage to the model. While their review of literature indicates that others have also called for a termination or final stage past the performing stage to the model of group development, this stage of group development is seldom referenced.

The second stream of research assesses the phases of group problem solving or decision development. Like the first, this series of studies focused on the discovery of sequences of activities through which groups reach solutions. The underlying and persistent theme is that groups move forward through an inevitable progression of decision development. Good reviews of this line of research are provided by McGrath (1984) and Applbaum (1988). None of the development schemas describe or analyze the group's termination stage. Whether the concern is personal development as identified by group dynamics research or decision development, the term "group development" is somewhat of a misnomer. Neither focuses on the complete life cycle of the group from development through maintenance through termination.

Gersick (1988) provides an alternative by focusing on naturally-occurring teams brought together specifically to do

projects in a limited time period. Questions driving her research included: "what does a group in an organization do, from the moment it convenes to the end of its life span, to create the specific product that exists at the conclusion of its last meeting?" (Gersick, 1988, p. 11). Using complete life spans of eight organizational groups, Gersick found that groups did not accomplish task objectives by progressing gradually through a universal series of stages as traditional group development models predict. Rather, teams progressed in a pattern of punctuated equilibrium alternating inertia and revolution in achieving the group's work task. In the punctuated equilibrium, "systems progress through an alternation of stasis and sudden appearance--long periods of inertia, punctuated by concentrated, revolutionary periods of quantum change. Systems' histories are expected to vary because situational contingencies are expected to influence significantly the path a system takes at its inception and during periods of revolutionary change, when systems' directions are formed and reformed" (Gersick, 1988, p. 16).

Within Gersick's phase 1-transition-phase 2 pattern of groups, the last meeting of phase 2 is of special importance because it is described as the period when groups markedly accelerate and finish off work generated during phase 2. Then the model stops. How the group members review their work and progress in the group is not mentioned even though she considers how teams discussed the expectations of outsiders who would receive, review, or use the groups' work. Gersick's model of task group life cycle is more complete because it addresses the larger

organizational context and the ending period of group life. Acknowledging group attempts to consider external evaluation is important because most definitions of team effectiveness include external evaluation as part of the larger definition of effectiveness.

Hackman and Walton (1986) provide a explanation of Gersick's earlier unpublished work which is close to a complete life cycle model of organizational work groups. They view Gersick's concluding period as a "good opportunity for a leader to encourage members to review the life and work of the group and to learn from those reflections" (p. 101). This expansion is important because Hackman and Walton's definition of team effectiveness argues that acceptable group output should also show gains in the competence of the team as a performing unit and personal growth of individual members. "The completion phase is a good time to consider how these personal and collective lessons can be consolidated and extended" (Hackman & Walton, 1986, p. 101).

Inching toward an Evaluation Phase

The group development and decision development literature focus on the group or individual through the decision or problem activities and stop just short of a task and process evaluation as the group completes its life cycle. Many group effectiveness models indicate that groups should perform this important evaluation. In his organizational group text, Goodall (1990) suggests that standards for evaluation include both positive and negative aspects of group process. Further, he suggests that leaders of task groups in organizations should help groups improve

performance. Like other small group texts, a separate and final chapter is dedicated to observing and evaluating groups. While not explicitly stated, Goodall's (1990) evaluation chapter is targeted to the leader of the group or the superior to whom the group reports. Because the organizational context is replete with performance evaluations, evaluative standards and procedures often focus on the individual in the group, not on the group as a whole.

Leave-Taking in Organizational Work Groups

Very little has been written about the general subject or effect of leave-taking behaviors. One of the few is Knapp, Hart, Friedrich, and Shulman's (1973) analysis of the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of leave-taking in the dyadic information exchange setting. Leave-taking in an organizational group context has some unique characteristics which have dramatic effect on how the process is facilitated (or not facilitated in most cases). Partners of a long-term dyadic relationship leave one another (often in a relational decline stage) not intending to have further (or at least intensive) interaction within one another. Organizational members leaving a group context, however, have to operate with the more closely defined sphere of the organization and may be assigned again to work with another, or someone who knows the other (and on and on). If the group is significant to the organization, group relationships that exist and cease are part of the larger organizational memory and reside as reference markers for members. These markers are used to provide information about work group processing behaviors and

idiosyncratic information about individuals for organizational members.

Moreover, in the organizational group context, each person is leaving at least two other organizational members. As such, the roles of who-is-leaving-whom become confused. If one of your group co-members is also assigned permanently to your department, the leave-taking process should be substantially different than leaving another group co-member who works in a different division in another organizational location. The confusion may be exacerbated in that information about the group's cessation may not be distributed to all group members at the same time or in the same manner. Clouding the situation is that in most organizational task groups, completing the task takes precedent over the resolution of relationships and the dissolution of the group.

While the interpersonal literature focuses primarily on the decline or decay of relationships (for example, see Argyle, 1986; Baxter, 1985; Duck, 1986; & Rusbult, 1987), the opposite may occur in organizational settings. For example, a work group may have successfully achieved its objective, yet is forced to conclude operating because its task is complete. For some organizational work groups, postive rather than negative environment may preclude the group's termination. Thus, decline or decay is not always a precursor to group termination and not the focus of this argument. Rather than looking for faulty group process to explain group ineffectiveness, here the focus is specific to group relationships that <u>must</u> terminate as part of the group's natural life cycle

(e.g., completion of task) or terminate due to organizational or systemic causes (mergers, acquisitions, transfers, promotions, re-assignments).

Knapp et al. (1973) do make some points regarding leave-taking that can be extrapolated to the organizational work group context. They argue that the termination phase should be considered very much a *part* of the total transaction. As such, three elements of leave-taking--accessibility, supportiveness, and summarizing--are identified. These elements are likely to occur in the organizational context as well. The termination phase seems to be appropriate for letting others in the group know their interaction was valued. In these expressions, group members gain understanding of the likelihood for future personal or professional interaction and the level of satisfaction with the group's interaction. It is also a most appropriate venue to signal the level of support group members will have for one another. The leave-taking stage provides an opportunity to wrap it up just one more time by restating the outcome of the group process. These three elements are part of a routinized leave-taking repertoire, yet research has given little insight into how these processes occur. In the initial study, Knapp et al. (1973) found no evidence that dyadic communicators engaged in summarizing activities during the leave-taking process. For a group, a summary of its task content, task procedures, and relational issues would seem essential. Summarizing may be specific to context (Knapp et al, 1973).

Definitions Require an Analysis of a Group's Goodbye

Hackman (1990) defines organizational work groups by three attributes. First, the group should be real with an intact social system and boundaries. Interdependence is achieved as members take on differentiated roles. Second, the group performs a task for which members must take collective responsibility. Third, the group is situated in a larger organizational context forcing group members to interact *and* sustain relations with other individuals and groups. Because work groups have varying degrees of continual activity, a contractual and expansive nature characterizes organizational work groups. Including a period at the end of the group's development for self-assessment and to negotiate the ending of the group will help group members retain positive and avoid negative attitudes toward their other organizational group responsibilities. Hackman (1990) adds self-assessment and reflection to the group effectiveness equation, but these elements are seldom included in models that emerge from observing naturally occurring groups or are juxtaposed on groups in experimental and laboratory situations.

In this most recent account of organizational work groups, Hackman (1990) discusses top management groups, task forces, professional support groups, performing groups, human service teams, customer service teams, and production teams. Of the 21 reports of groups representing each of these types, only one case study indicates that the group purposely devoted time to self-directed feedback at the end of its life cycle. Davis-Sacks (1990) reporting on a political tracking team indicates that the

group leader "called a meting to review the work the team had accomplished and to thank members for their efforts. . . . At the end of the team's life, Elaine tried to relieve members' frustration and unhappiness by pointing out the good work that the team had, in fact, done" (pp. 168-169). This is the only group which attempted to negotiate a comfortable end to its existence. The only other mention of a terminationn phase are three reports of groups who are led through the ending session by a researcher as facilitator. Few groups can afford that luxury or expense of bringing in external facilitators.

Why a Group Goodbye is Needed

If groups are given the authority and responsibility to make important organizational decisions, these same groups should be encouraged to evaluate task accomplishment and group interaction. Not including this final phase leaves groups without an effective model for making group termination something more than just saying goodbye. To make groups effective centers of organizational learning, groups should be given the opportunity to discuss both the task and the process by which the task was completed. Including an evaluative learning session in the final phase of group work also allows group members the opportunity to make the "goodbye" more effective on a personal level. Some organizational groups spend weeks or months together, often under difficult and trying circumstances. Personal relationships develop during these interactions and are maintained as a network of support or a shield from negative criticism. Without an opportunity to say goodbye and negotiate a less intensive but enduring relationship,

a group member may be jumping from a supportive atmosphere where speaking one's mind and constructive feedback was the norm to a non-supportive atmosphere of direct and ugly confrontation.

Sometimes organizational work groups become sites where the "golden boy" or "girl" status develops for group members. Or, it can be an honor to be chosen for special task group activities. Awarded special time and resources, group members come to expect special treatment since they receive it from their current group. Going back the normal organizational environment can be especially hazardous for these individuals. Other organizational members may be over critical because they were not selected for these special task force assignments and treat returning group members in hostile and negative fashion. In these instances, it is even more important for group members to negotiate the end of the group as well as negotiate the continuation of relationships that only came into existence through the group project.

Groups should have an opportunity to reflect and learn, and to negotiate its termination. Shea and Guzzo (1987) perceive groups as a vital human resource and argue that "organizational members will need to know how to start-up, maintain, and shut-down groups as well as how to handle their individual jobs" (p. 327). By making group interaction a learning experience, group members can take positive norms and constructive group attitudes to their subsequent group assignments. Researchers in performance feedback (Nadler, 1979) and norm development (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985) have documented that performance feedback can be a powerful force in shaping expectations about future success on a task and

that group members bring the norms developed in previous group experiences to subsequent group encounters. Because the group is a constant and enduring feature of organizational life (Shea & Guzzo, 1987), the interpersonal skills needed to develop, maintain, and then terminate groups are necessary skills for organizational members.

Why Isn't External Feedback Enough?

Throughout Hackman's (1990) case studies, typical group effectiveness criteria include audience reaction, management acceptance, or client/customer satisfaction. In addition, time, budget, and other organizational parameters are considered. All of these are factors of external evaluation. Why aren't these adequate? First, some of these external evaluation factors only come into play after the group has disbanded and its membes have reorganized for another task or have become absorbed back into the larger organization. Second, the group may have achieved important milestones in interaction competence, but produced a product that was not well received by its intended audience. Although few would accept this condition as ultimate team effectiveness, for a new team or one with a history of difficult or hostile interaction, bringing the group to a new level of interaction competence can be a significant achievement.

Exiting is Not Always the Same as Saying Goodbye

In the only review of the organizational exit literature, Jablin (1987) admits that there are few studies focusing on employees leaving their jobs and exiting the organization. It is difficult to use this limited literature base because there are

unique factors that impend on an employee's organizational exit. Jablin concludes that "while the nature of an employee's communication relationships with coworkers may not directly impact his or her turnover propensity, these relationships likely impact his or her affective responses to the work environment, which in turn are associated with intent to leave" (1987, p. 721). Although turnover and group termination are not the same phenomenon, we can expect group termination to be met with some of the same communication consequences. Like high turnover level, group members may have to spend more group time restructuring their communication network when one member leaves as well as provide time to compensate for their professional and personal loss.

Wanting to Negotiate Sailing Off into the Sunset

The opportunity to observe a group's entire life cycle from assignment through development and maintenance, and into termination highlights the termination phenomenon.The group was a self-learning group and part of a larger conference on empowering one's self through effective communication. Participants had been given their group assignments based on need statements they brought to the conference. Subsequently, each of eight groups were composed of members who had different needs and who had different exposures to self-learning. I was assigned to a group as an assistant facilitator. My role was to engage in observation and analysis with and under the supervision of the senior facilitator. The group met three times a day for five days; its task was to initiate a learning objective based upon the

interpersonal needs of the participants. In between self-study sessions, content learning sessions were facilitated in conference style with participants of all groups present. Although not an organizational task group, this group was part of a larger temporary organizational setting. Describing this group's conclusion will illustrate the difficulty of bringing the conclusion of the group to the level of overt talk when all members are not prepared for the group's termination.

As in most self-study groups, this group was not sure where to begin and how to proceed. The group did find, however, a path of least resistance; members talked about the interpersonal interaction that led to their recognition that they needed "help" in communicating with others. As each story unfolded, the group took on a step-wise progression approach. Each participant divulged public and non-intimate information initially gradually working up to revealing the sometimes poignant communication event which became the catalyst for participating in this type of conference. Each day, group members became more trusting and let the group know more than the previous day. The facilitators (myself, the senior facilitator, and another assistant facilitator) believed that the group was making good progress. In fact, our group was making unobstructed progress in comparison to the other group progress reports we were hearing in the facilitator learning session. We were pleased.

Just prior to the last session, the group seemed at a standstill. Knowing that the end of these sessions was coming, there were mixed emotions. The group had established a network of

trust and support through sharing. In an exercise on loss and grieving, group members came to realize that the group's network of trust and support would not accompany them home to their personal and professional environments. The group made reference to this several times; each time, the topic was dropped quickly. Silence invaded the group for the first time since the awkward getting-to-know-you-who's-going-to-go-first interaction of the first meeting. And then one member started to develop this story . . . .

Nick: I'd like to talk about a brief issue that came up in the exercise a few minutes ago. One of the things I wrote down as a loss that I grieved over was my house boat. I had planned to finish and live in it at some point in time. I had only covered the roof and put the flooring in and few of the walls. It was consuming a lot of my time and I didn't have the funds to continue working on it. In the meantime I moved in with Sally. She had the place before we met and I moved in with her. We live there now. It's a duplex with two bedrooms. But it's becoming not enough space for us, for me. With having to keep the kosher kitchen and the hobbies I have, we're running out of room. The laundry is in the middle of the space and--it's just not enough room for me. (long pause) I don't feel like it's my space.

Brenda: Does she make you feel like a visitor?

Nick: No, she doesn't do anything to make me feel like a visitor; she doesn't treat me like a visitor. It's just that there's not enough space to do what I want. We don't have a shared space. Some of the issues of our relationship could be dealt with better if I didn't have my house boat. The money is a big issue. I'd like for us to have a different space, a bigger space.

Faye: What's Sally's reaction to the house boat ?

Nick: Well, she doesn't want to live there. I've showed her the plans and I've taken her down there. I had planned to do several things to it, but the funds just aren't available. A friend suggested that I go ahead and do the things I wanted to before I sold it so it would give me a sense of control over it. I'd like to put a window in here and I like to put in the bathroom. I've already drawn the plans. If I sold the house boat, then I'd have the money to buy a house; we only rent now. But that would bring up other issues.

Bruce: Bring this back to the here and now. What would you want or need from the group? What do you need right now?

Nick: I'd like to talk about it.

Bruce: What? The relationship?

Nick: Yes, there's stress in the relationship because we, I, don't have the . . . .

Although all group members had been sensitized to the issue of loss and grieving in preparation for the inevitable termination of their self-study group, only Nick was aware of his need to say goodbye. He chose to substitute his relationship with his live-in girlfriend and the stresses and strains of that relationships to talk to the other group members on a safer plateau. It was not surprising to the facilitator team that Nick was the only member of this group who had been through this conference before. He knew the end was coming. His inability to deal with it came from his expectations and experiences in the previous conference. Nick could not speak directly about what was troubling him. He needed to speak through some other topic to focus his feelings for this group and what the group experience meant to him. Nick was trying to say goodbye.

. . . money to provide a house like I'd like to. But then the issue of marriage comes up. Now, it's not going to be a problem for us like her friend. I've told you about her friend that's Jewish who is living with a non-Jewish man. But Sally still has problems with marrying outside of the faith. Now, I'm not a religious person. I don't practice any specific religion. I was raised a Catholic and took first communion when I was twelve, but well, we went to a wedding a few weeks ago, not a Jewish wedding, just a Christian wedding. They had us stand, and kneel and those sorts of things. It wasn't necessary to the ceremony. It seemed like they were taking the opportunity of the wedding to inflict their religion on me. I'm not rebellious, but I did not stand or kneel. I just sat there.

Diane: I think it wounds like you're afraid of being drawn in . . . to the religion.

Nick: No, that's not it. It just seems like if I had the money from the sale of the house boat to buy us a house, it would bring up other issues.

Faye: Do you ever go and look for houses?

Nick: Sure, we go to the Dream Street and say we like that and we like this, but I don't have the funds to buy a house.

Bruce: How do you share expenses for the rent now?

Nick: We split the rent.

Bruce: I think it sounds like a space issue. You've said several times that you're invading her space and that you need to get openness back.

Nick: Well now, I'm not invading. It's just not the right space for us.

Faye: Well, let me share with you what I think. You've not really included Sally in your plans for the house boat, and if that was me, I would want total and equal input. I would want to develop the plan with you.

Nick is putting the issue of "how do we say goodbye and go back to where we came from" before the group. Group members ignored this subtle and covert request, but they do agree to participate in Nick's extended story of building the house boat and its effect on his relationship with Sally.

Fantasy theme analysis (Bormann, 1985, 1986) may prove to be a useful tool for investigating the termination of groups because fantasies can mirror the here-and-now concerns of group members. Fantasy theme analysis originated in Bales' (1950, 1970) work with dramatic themes that occurred in the small groups he observed. Bormann expanded Bales' idea by defining a group's shared fantasy as "comprehensible forms for explaining their [the group's] past and thinking about their future--a basis for communication and

group consciousness" (Bormann, 1985, p. 128). His symbolic convergence theory explains both the creation and development processes of a group culture and how a group's culture affects its task dimension (Bormann, 1986). A fantasy is a group's creative or imaginative interpretation of the group's events. A group member generally introduces a theme based on his/her own psychological involvement in the group or based on some concern with the group. If picked up by the group, the fantasy theme can become an integral part of the group's communication as the fantasy "sparks the chain of reactions and feelings" (Bormann, 1985, p. 131) of the group's members. The fantasy development process has been further confirmed and studied in the Minnesota case studies of zero-history, leaderless task groups.

This type of analysis is often used in therapy groups. McClure (1987) points out that a group's metaphoric expression can be used as a way to: 1) verify a group's stage of development, 2) provide information about members' identities, 3) direct the group's attention from a past- to a present centered focus, and 4) creatively generate feedback about a group's processes. He argues that "metaphoric language becomes the staging area for preparation of the group's future course. It symbolically enables the group to try out new behaviors, ideas, and feelings helping the members to decide on norms for their future interactions" (McClure, 1987, p. 180).

It is easy to extrapolate the fantasy which Nick is generating and wanting his other group members to participate in to the group's present experience. Within just a few hours, this

group will cease to exist. Only Nick knows what it is like to be part of trusting, supportive self-study group of this conference and then be returned to a more threatening and less supportive environment. Nick chooses to talk about how the group might end by explaining the relationship between his feelings for Sally and the complication of the house boat.

Nick reports that "I had planned to finish it and live in it at some point in time," as if to say that "this is the type of interaction environment that I like. If I could, this is how I'd live. And, I'm recognizing this just at the point we need to start to say goodbye." He refers to his more threatening reality by making reference to the duplex in which he and Sally live and his feelings of being in a limited space. His continual references to not having "enough funds" to finish the house boat can be translated as his feelings of inadequacy in not having the interpersonal resources or skills to engage in the supportive interaction that dominates the conference and self-study groups--the type of interaction he prefers to his daily interaction reality of living with Sally.

Another analogy can be drawn between Nick's description of the house boat structure to the interaction structure of his group. Like the house boat, this group has adequate, but not extravagant or frivolous features. What is necessary is there. Both structures can be added to at a later point in time, but both structures are operating and sustaining respective activities. Nick alludes that this type of structure is comforting becasue he

knows the basics are supplied and that growth (building) is possible.

When Brenda brings up the topic of feeling like a visitor, Nick's response sets up an evaluation of this group experience. He explains that he does not feel like an outsider, but that he's "running out of room" and that it's just not his space. Brenda's question sets up a determination of in-group/out-group status. Nick acknowledges he's made to feel a part of this group, but also acknowledges that the group will be coming to an end before he can take full advantage of using what the group and this experience could provide him. Faye's inquiry about Sally's reaction to the boat can be interpreted as asking Nick to tell other group members if their reaction to him has been helpful or hurtful. His reply centers around recognition that changes in his interpersonal communication must be generated by him, but he also lets the group know that he has problems maintaining control. Similarly, Nick cannot exert control over the group to encourage them to say goodbye to the experience and each other.

Nick's reference to religion and his hesitancy in accepting religious practices can be transferred to his hesitancy in communicating like he wants. His reference to "they were taking the opportunity of the wedding to inflict their religion on me" can be transferred to his evaluation of the effective communication principles which were practiced all week at the conference at large by all participants, and specifically by this group. Nick offers that he can see their point, but that it's just not for him indicating that he acknowledges another role or

model of communication practice but that he's not comfortable in adopting those practices.

The fantasy dialogue continues. Although the other group members are not fully participating by drawing the house boat or religion theme into their own interaction, they are encouraging Nick to unwind his fantasy of how difficult it is to say goodbye and let go of a group experience.

Dianne: I'm frustrated. You get right to the edge of the issue and then you run like hell. What is it that you want from the group? What can we do to help? What questions can we ask? What questions can you ask us?

Nick: I need your input and her input so I can make a commitment.

Faye: To the house boat or her?

Nick comes to the brink of making the group talk about saying goodbye. Resisting his request, the group continues to shift the conversation back to the site of Nick's other difficulties. In attempting to move the group to the leave-taking process, Nick may also be forewarning the other group members of the difficulty they will find in transferring what is learned and experienced in the conference and this group to the home environment.

Goodbye, Farewell, & Amen

Another example of the importance of self-learning, reflection, and the opportunity to say goodbye is aptly illustrated in the final episode of *M*A*S*H* (air date February 28, 1983). As the episode unfolds, peace in Korea finally seems to be near. But as the peace talks continue, casualties provide a steady stream of activity for the mobile army surgical hospital. The peace talks, however, have aroused positive thoughts about

going home. The group members (Margaret, Col. Potter, Klinger, BJ, and Winchester; Hawkeye is temporarily hospitalized for psychiatric observation) talk about their futures and what they plan when they finally get to go home.

At the end of the this two hour drama, a poignant scene unfolds as they (including Hawkeye) say goodbye to one another and their lives as the 4077th. The plans the characters reveal will make it difficult for members to get together in the future. Rather than being pulled together by a common denominator, they will be scattered across the States.

The scene emphasizes an important point: sometimes we say how we really feel or what we really mean when there *won't* be another opportunity to say it again. A goodbye and the interaction that surrounds it is a special type of communication. With a goodbye comes a referencing of past events, a time to balance the positives and negatives, and an opportunity to be gut-wrenching honest about feelings. The awkwardness of saying goodbye is ingrained in our culture.

*M*A*S*H* points to the many inconsistencies of saying goodbye. How is that men who never cry and show feelings, weep, and give affectionate hugs? In the time of goodbye many social conventions just don't hold up. Saying goodbye in a meaningful dyadic relationship is awkward. A group context exponentially compounds behavioral standards. How does the group context with multiple and often unique relationships set the stage when a person leaves a group or when the group will never be a group again.

While it's easy to rationalize that these more emotional goodbyes are not part of an organizational context, the real goodbyes of M*A*S*H's acting and production groups underscores the poignancy of saying goodbye (Alda & Alda, 1983). Alda reflects on the end of both his character's group and his own work group--as the final day came closer, it became hard to face leaving. He recognized that "this is the last time I'll do this" (Alda & Alda, 1983, p. 38). As part of a larger context, the conclusion of these groups also affected American TV viewers, television commentators, and editorial and political cartoonists who publicly joined these two groups in saying goodbye. The termination and goodbye phase at the group level is evidenced as a cartoonist captures the surgeons and nurses operating on a silent television set. The cartoon's caption reads: "We've done all we can." (Alda & Alda, 1983, p. 72). Most would categorize the *M*A*S*H* episode as a special case and few of us can recall (or admit) organizational work experiences that have held us so emotionally vulnerable. But, the end of this work group and how one says goodbye is illustrated in striking detail.

Hawkeye is angry that BJ left without so much as writing him a note (recall that Trapper did the same thing). When BJ's trip home is cancelled and he returns to the 4077, their relationship is strained. Hawkeye confronts BJ with:

"I know it's tough for you to say goodbye. So I'll say it. I want you to know how much you mean to me. I'll miss you."

BJ: "I can't imagine what a lot of this place would be like if I hadn't found you here."

Many may be tempted to exclude the goodbye of a fictional character group when arguing that this phenomenon is worthy of research pursuits. Piccirillo (1986), however, in analyzing the final and temporary conclusions of television series documents that televised, fictional goodbyes have increased within the last decade. Other examples of the termination of or a significant change in membership of intact television character work groups include: 1) the departure of Col. Henry Blake from *M*A*S*H*, 2) the departure of Radar O'Reilly from *M*A*S*H*, 3) Jack Soo leaving *Barney Miller*, and 4) the conclusion of *Barney Miller*. This medium recognizes that terminating interaction is a phenomenon that needs addressing. In doing so, the medium and its makers are providing an arm chair analysis of these events.

Developing a Research Agenda

To pursue analysis of the termination of organizational work groups, a research agenda must be developed. This deficiency is evident from the review of the organizational communication and organizational behavior literature covering group development, decision development, and group effectiveness. The following list is intended to stimulate research, not explicitly define or limit research parameters.

In the organizational setting:

1) How does a work group communicate in the termination phase?

Are goodbyes included?

How are formal goodbyes differentiated from informal goodbyes? Professional differentiated from personal?

How are these events structured?

Who structures them?

What other communication occurs in this phase?

2) What effect does group termination have on individual group members and larger organization?

How is information from the work group transfered to organizational memory?

How are relationships altered and/or maintained after the group is terminated?

How was the end of the group communicated to group members?

To the organization?

Conclusion

How we say goodbye does reinforce how we'll interpret what we've experienced and what expectations we'll take to similar situations. This is particularly important for group members who are the cast of the continuing cycle of group members within their organization. A bad committee experience biases how you accept your next committee assignment (e.g., as a kiss of death). Being encouraged to say goodbye allows an opportunity apart from the task to talk about the interaction process and the relational components of that task group. It's a time to defuse, to let the emotional impact of the task not be the group's primary objective. It's a time to reflect on what's happened and how, a time to take the good forward and a time to let bad experiences be analyzed for what they are.

Fantasy theme analysis should provide direction in initial stages of research. Being able to uncover these themes and facilitate their discovery with the intact group members could provide additional insight into the phenomenon. Analysis of this type should even be useful in a simulated organizational work group environment.

Another theoretical approach which could be helpful in examining this phenomenon is life cycle theory, an organization theory examining how organizations are born, change, and disappear. Euske and Roberts (1987) summarize the theory and review its application in examining life cycles of organizations. They indicate that life cycle theory holds that an organization depends on its environment for needed resources, that organizations are highly adaptive, and that internal processes affect organizational structure and survival. In assessing the communication implications of this type of theory, Euske and Roberts (1987) suggest that attention be paid to the communication components of organizational birth and death. These ideas could easily be transferred to the work group context while providing an overriding framework for discovery.

We're not very good at saying goodbye. Many of us want to avoid it. Perhaps we think that for good experiences not saying goodbye means we haven't left and for bad experiences that it didn't happen. Unfortunately, either strategy leaves us with emotional and relational baggage that we will undoubtedly take to our next group to judge both the task and the people who are part of our group.

Building time for assessing group process and time for negotiating the end of the group should have many positive benefits. The close of business for an organizational work group feeds into the larger organizational memory as group members: 1) review what was completed; 2) assess output versus objectives; 3) assess the group's ability to meet the evaluation criteria of those who use or view group output; 4) review the process the group used in completing task objectives; 5) recognize and celebrate group accomplishments; and 6) facilitate the ending of the group relationship. Knowing where we stand as a group member on both task and relational dimensions makes it easier to goodbye.

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